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AUTHOR Hartman, Rachael A.
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ABSTRACT

This survey investigated the services offered to older adults by public libraries in northeastern Ohio. Questionnaires were mailed to 120 public libraries in that region, and 80 (66.6%) of them were returned. The responding libraries were divided into three categories based on the size of their service population: (1) over 50,000 people (16.3%); (2) 20,000 to 50,000 people (31.2%); and (3) under 20,000 people (52.5%). Data is provided regarding services such as large-print collections, telecommunications devices for the deaf (TDDs), books-on-tape, home delivery, special periodicals targeting older adults, magnifiers, deposit collections in nursing homes, and fine-free library cards for seniors. Results indicate that libraries in northeastern Ohio are doing fairly well at offering services that have been around for awhile: large-print materials, books-on-tape, and delivery services. Newer services, however, need improvement: TDDs, special programming, and the provision of older adult services librarians/staff. Ten figures illustrate the data, and the survey cover letter and a blank survey form are appended. (Contains 13 references.) (BEW)

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PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES TO OLDER ADULTS IN NORTHEASTERN OHIO

A Master's Research Paper submitted to the
Kent State University School of Library and Information Science
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Master of Library Science

by

Rachael A. Hartman

November, 1995

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ABSTRACT

Hartman, Rachael A. "Public Library Services to Older Adults in Northeastern Ohio." Kent State University (1995).

The purpose of this research paper is to investigate what materials and services, if any, are being offered to older adults by public libraries in Northeastern Ohio. A survey of eleven questions was mailed to one hundred twenty public libraries in Northeastern Ohio, and two-thirds of the surveys were returned. It was found that large-print books and books-on-tape, frequently used by older adults, are available in most public libraries. Special magazines for older adults are also available in the majority of libraries. The most common of the services offered to older adults is home delivery of materials, either in person or by mail, followed by talking book machines and fine-free cards. This paper points out that, due to the number of older adults in Northeastern Ohio, services to this group should certainly be offered by public libraries of all sizes.

Master's Research Paper by
Rachael A. Hartman
B.S., Kent State University, 1993
M.L.S., Kent State University, 1995

Approved by

Advisor _____ Date _____

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INTRODUCTION

It is well known that the number of older adults is increasing yearly, while the populations of younger people are decreasing. Part of this, of course, is a result of the largest American demographic, the "baby boomers," growing older. It is also a result of the fact that people are living longer now than they did a few decades ago. In 1990, 12.9% of the population of Ohio was over 65 years of age.¹ By 2010, it is estimated that people 65 and over will comprise 13.9% of Ohio's population, with another 26.6% over 45.² It would stand to reason, then, with such growing numbers in these age groups, that public libraries would be making an effort to serve this population. Additionally, the American Library Association and the White House have both been concerned with aging recently. The purpose of this study, then, was to determine if public libraries in Northeastern Ohio were making an effort to meet the needs of older adults, which, for the purposes of this study, are defined as those 65 years of age and older. This area's population of people over 65 was, like the state's, 12.9% in 1990.³ This study was limited to public libraries of all sizes in Northeastern Ohio, which includes the following counties: Ashtabula, Columbiana, Cuyahoga, Geauga, Holmes, Lake, Lorain, Mahoning, Medina, Portage, Stark, Summit, Trumbull, and Wayne.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A literature search was conducted using Library Literature, LISA, ERIC, and Ebsco. There were a few articles of great importance to the present study. One, conducted by Anderson, Luster, and Woolridge, took place in the Pittsburgh area. Older adults were questioned regarding their library use, reading habits, and what type of services they felt the public library should offer to them. Disturbingly, 38% of those completing surveys revealed that they never used the public library, yet 74% claimed to read every day. Those older adults that read as much as or more than other times in their lives numbered 70%. This survey also revealed what some of the reading interests of older adults are: current events, health, and cooking were the top three responses. The survey found that older adults felt the public library should offer, in terms of services, special programs at senior centers, materials delivery to the centers, and large-print materials. This study indicated that reading was an important activity for older adults, and that outreach to senior centers was believed to be necessary. It also showed the varying interests of the population. This information prompted the researchers to point out that older adults should be viewed as individuals, rather than as a homogenous group.⁴

Viewing older adults as individuals was also advocated by Celia Hales-Mabry, who pointed out four of the ALA's "Guidelines for Library Service to Older Adults" that, she felt, were important to reference librarians in particular. The first was to exhibit and promote a positive attitude to aging and older adults. This included avoiding stereotypes, such as automatically speaking loudly and slowly to an older adult, whether it is necessary or not. The second guideline was to promote information and resources on aging to family members and professionals, in addition to the older adults themselves. The third guideline mentioned was providing library service to ALL older adults, including, but not limited to, the minorities who are homebound, disabled, etc. The last guideline mentioned was to incorporate the changing needs of an aging population into the library's planning process.⁵

Allen and Wilkinson explained the results of a survey in Ontario of 500 public library users of all ages. The survey found that the patrons supported services such as large-print books, but were divided on whether or not to provide services and programming exclusively for seniors. When asked specifically about home delivery, for instance, those surveyed felt that it should be available to anyone confined to home, not exclusively senior citizens.⁶

Connie Van Fleet discussed service to the older adult. She found

that the number of older adults in a community had no impact on the services provided by the local public library. The article noted that oftentimes services for older adults overlap with those of another group --services to the institutionalized, for instance. Statistics show, however, that most older adults live independently; only 5 percent of older adults live in retirement or nursing homes. Services may also overlap with adult services. Certainly many older adults' interests are the same as the interests of younger adults, but they do have some special needs, and specialized library services should be provided.⁷

Alan Kleiman examined the concept of "older adult." Kleiman acknowledged that the concept is difficult to define, as many interpretations exist, including those of the American Association of Retired People (AARP), which places the beginning age at 50, and the federal government, which places the retirement age between 62 and 65. He also noted that this country's perception of age will continue to change as the baby boomers grow older. Whatever the definition, Kleiman maintained, older adult services should be redefined by the library community. His prediction for the libraries of the 21st century:

A strengthened emphasis on services based upon age is foreseen with older adult services sections becoming as commonplace as children's rooms. ...Services aimed at older adults will take into account the different phases of aging and the different informational needs for each age group. Patrons aged 55-65 (the young old)

and 65-75 (the middle old) will want resources on personal finance and retirement relocation, while those over 75 (the old old) have a keener interest in materials that answer their questions about daily living, such as what medications to take or which social services could help them.⁸

Thus, he continued, libraries of the future will have specific collections aimed toward the old, including recreational, educational, informational, and technological materials. Kleiman pointed out, disappointedly, that libraries are currently failing to meet the changing needs of older adults. He cited examples of others who are picking up the slack-- Borders and Barnes & Noble bookstores, among others, have not only collections for older adults, but also have clubs aimed toward them. Additionally, as of April 1995, not in one public library was there a SENIORNET site. SENIORNET is an online network for older adults that has nationwide computer learning centers. Kleiman asserted that "If libraries are to reach older patrons in the 21st century, they need to position themselves as 'leaders' in offering informational, recreational, and cultural services."⁹

To this end, the American Library Association's Midwinter preconference, "Towards the White House Conference on Aging: Defining Priorities and Policies for Library and Information Services for Older Adults" resulted in several policy recommendations relating to funding,

access for the elderly, lifelong learning, preferred telecommunications rates for libraries, and multiagency cooperation.¹⁰ These recommendations were taken to the White House Conference on Aging in May, 1995.

METHODOLOGY

An eleven question survey was mailed to 120 public libraries in the Northeastern Ohio area (see cover letter in Appendix A). The libraries were located using the American Library Directory. The survey contained questions relating to the types of materials and services, if any, offered by each library, as well as the types of programming, if any (see Appendix B). The completed surveys were returned to the researcher by mail. The data was analyzed with respect to the size of the libraries, the types of services, the types of programming, and whether or not the library had a staff member specifically for older adults. Percentages of libraries offering any of the above were tabulated.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Of the 120 questionnaires mailed, 80 (66.6%) were returned. Of those returned, 52.5% were received from libraries serving under 20,000 people, 31.2% of the surveys were from libraries serving 20,000-50,000, and 16.3% were from libraries serving over 50,000 people (see figure 1). The disparity in responses may be due to the larger libraries' increased business, or simply that they did not bother to respond to the survey. In response to the queries regarding large-print materials and books-on-tape, nearly all of the libraries answered that they offered these materials (see figures 2 and 3). Only one library each, out of all of the sizes, did not have large-print materials and books-on-tape. Therefore, the sizes of the libraries are probably, in these cases, irrelevant.

When questioned about delivery service and telecommunications devices for the deaf (TDDs), the size of the libraries appeared to have more of an impact. Delivery services to the homebound were available in 92% of the libraries serving over 50,000, 88% of the libraries serving 20-50,000, and 76% of the libraries serving less than 20,000 people (see figure 4). Although delivery services are common, they are available less frequently in smaller libraries. TDDs were available in 85% of the larger libraries, 20% of the medium-sized libraries, and 48% of the smaller libraries. This data was skewed, as some libraries attested to having

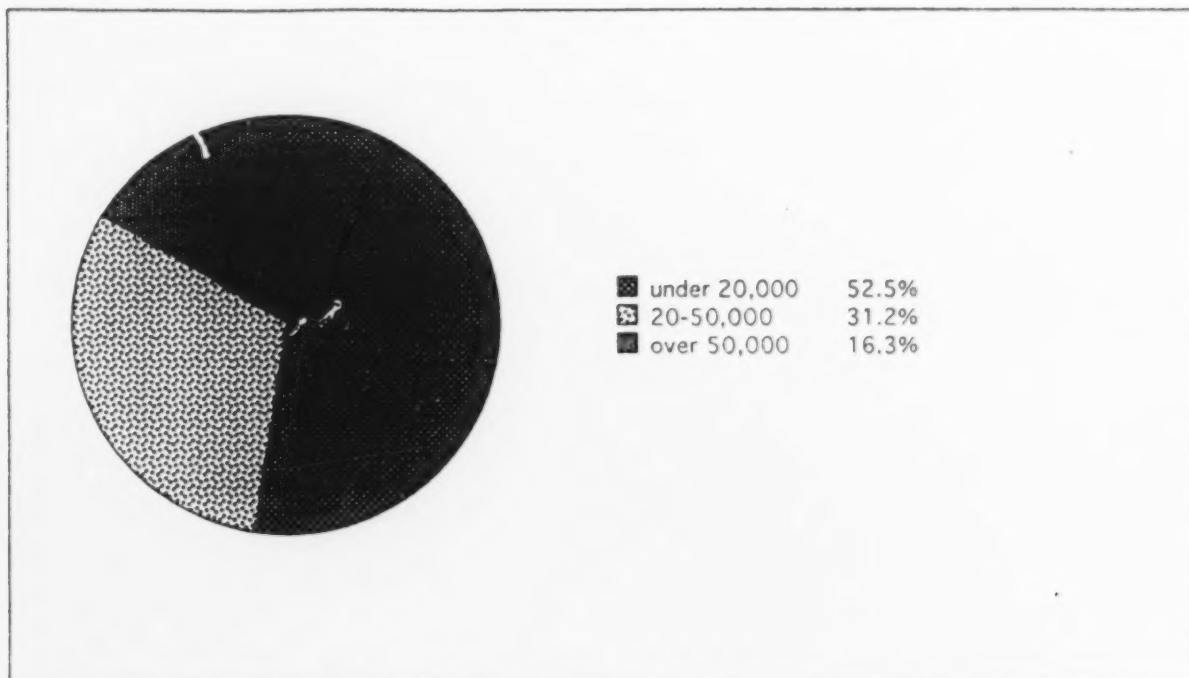


Figure 1. Distribution of Survey Responses by Size of Library Population

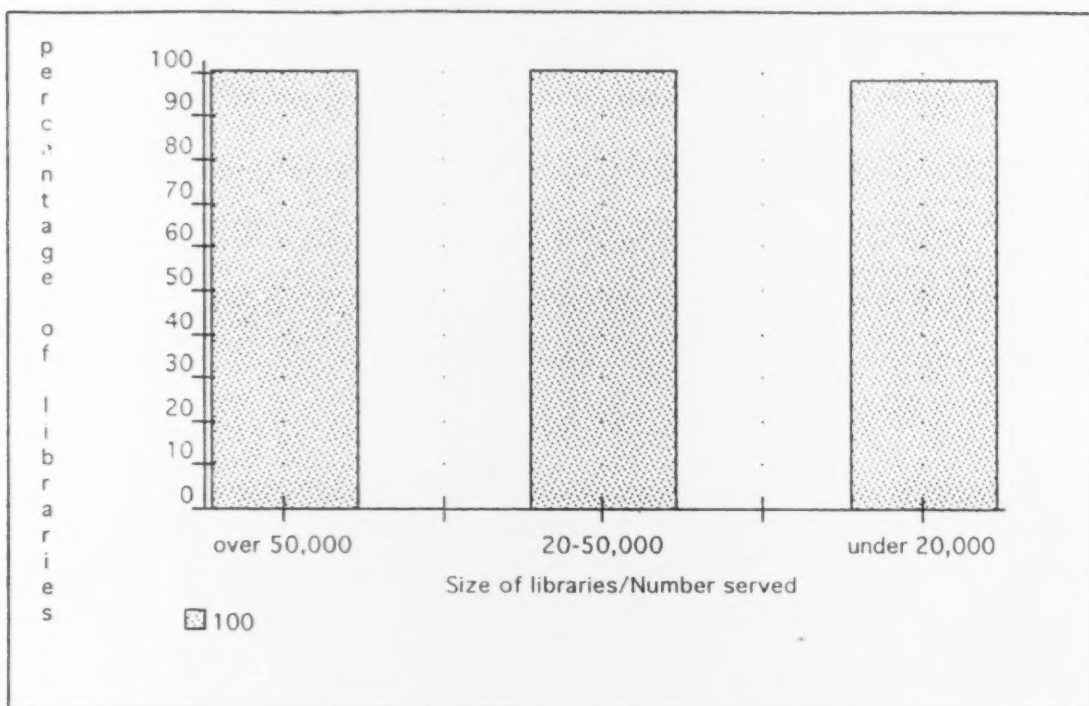


Figure 2. Percentage of Public Libraries with Large-Print Book Collections by Size of Population Served

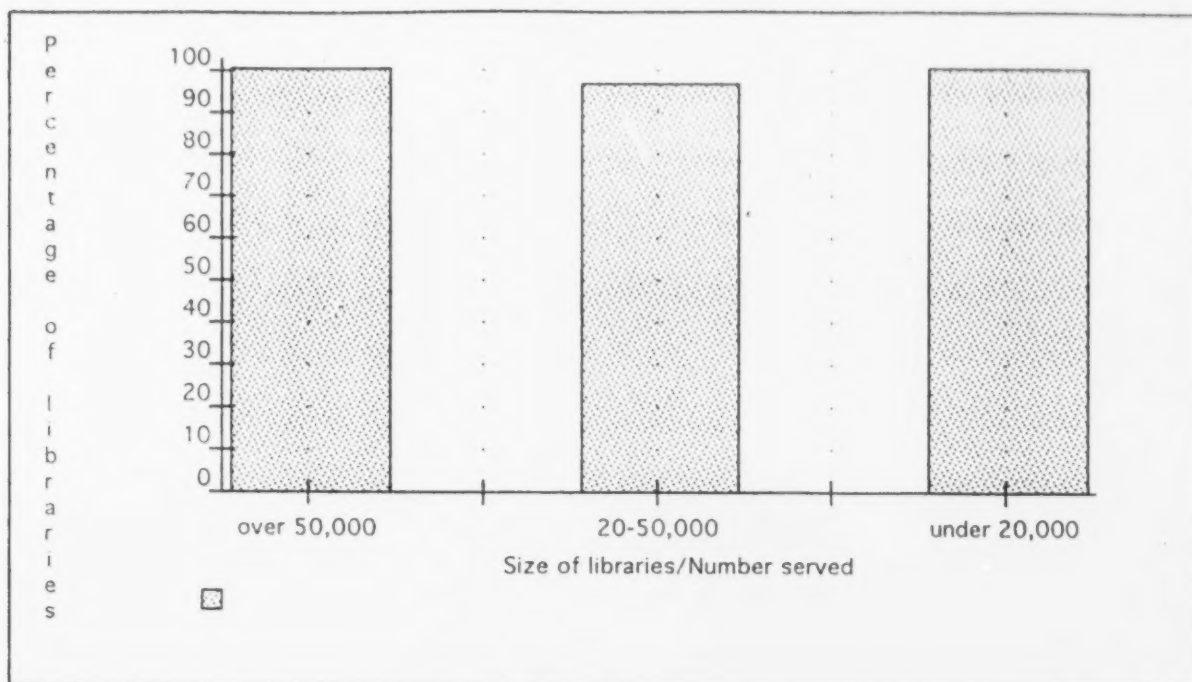


Figure 3. Percentage of Libraries with Books-on-Tape Collections by Size of Population Served

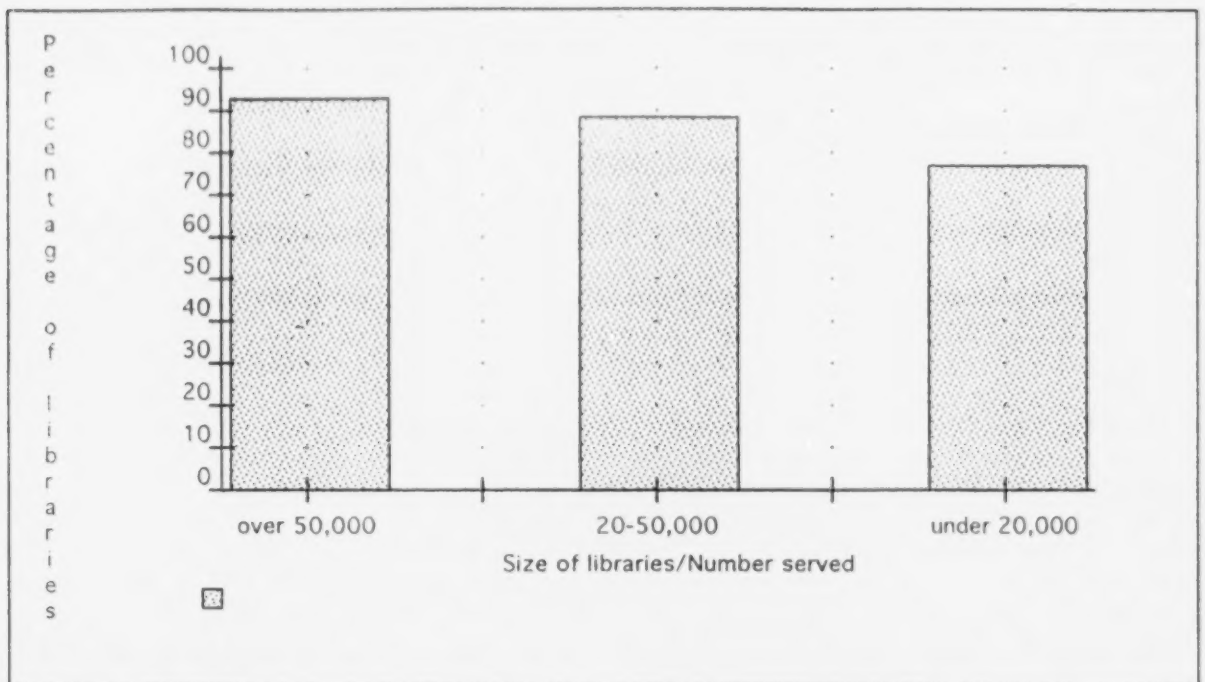


Figure 4. Percentage of Libraries that Offer Home Delivery by Size of Population Served

TDDs, when they did not, but their main branch/headquarters did, and other libraries in the same situation claimed to not have TDD access. In any case, the fact that 85% of the larger libraries versus 48% of the smaller libraries (see figure 5) have this equipment surely identifies itself as an issue related to size, be it number of patrons, or amount of funding.

Over three-fourths of the libraries surveyed subscribed to special periodicals for older adults. Both the larger and the middle-sized libraries offered the magazines in 85% or more cases, while the magazines were offered in 62% of the smaller libraries (see figure 6). Over fifteen different titles of periodicals were mentioned by those surveyed. Although every library did not offer a list of specific periodicals, many did. The five periodicals mentioned most frequently were Modern Maturity (23 times, 43% of those listing periodicals), New Choices for Retirement Living (21 times, 38%), Readers Digest Large Print (21 times, 38%), Reminisce (10 times, 19%), and Secure Retirement (8 times, 13%).

When questioned regarding other services offered to older adults, 62% of larger, 76% of medium, and 43% of smaller libraries responded affirmatively (see figure 7). Among those services offered were magnifiers and talking book machines, deposit collections in nursing homes, fine-free library cards for seniors, and Golden Buckeye Card

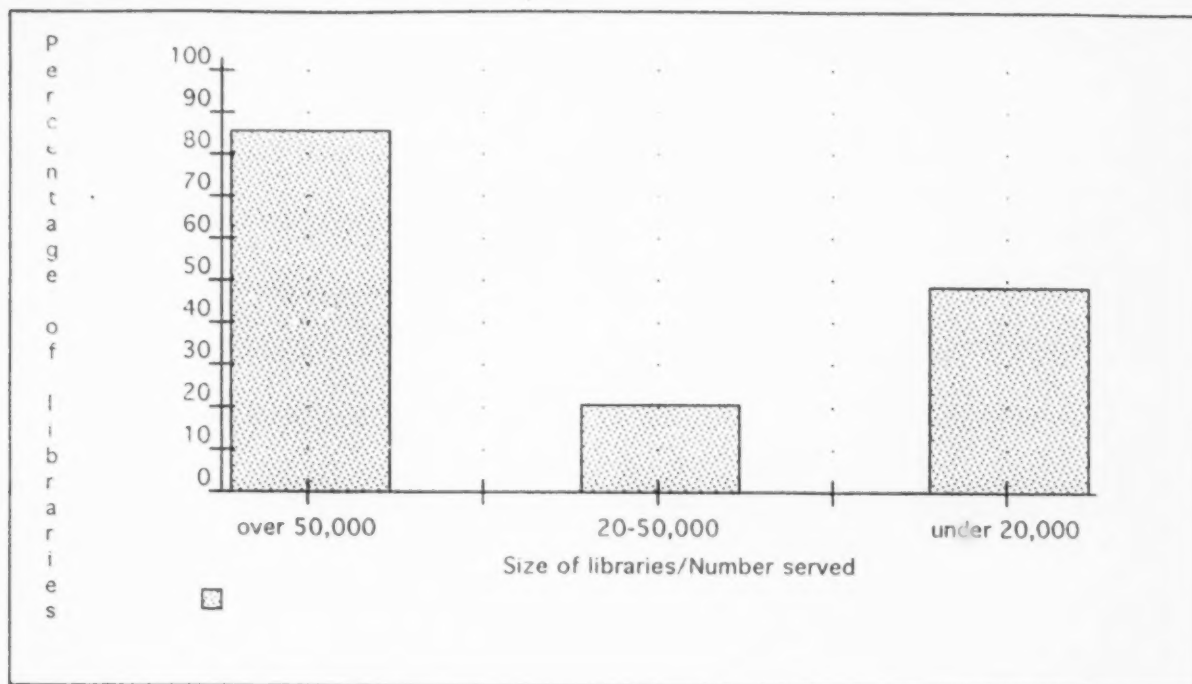


Figure 5. Percentage of Libraries that Offer TDDs by Size of Population Served

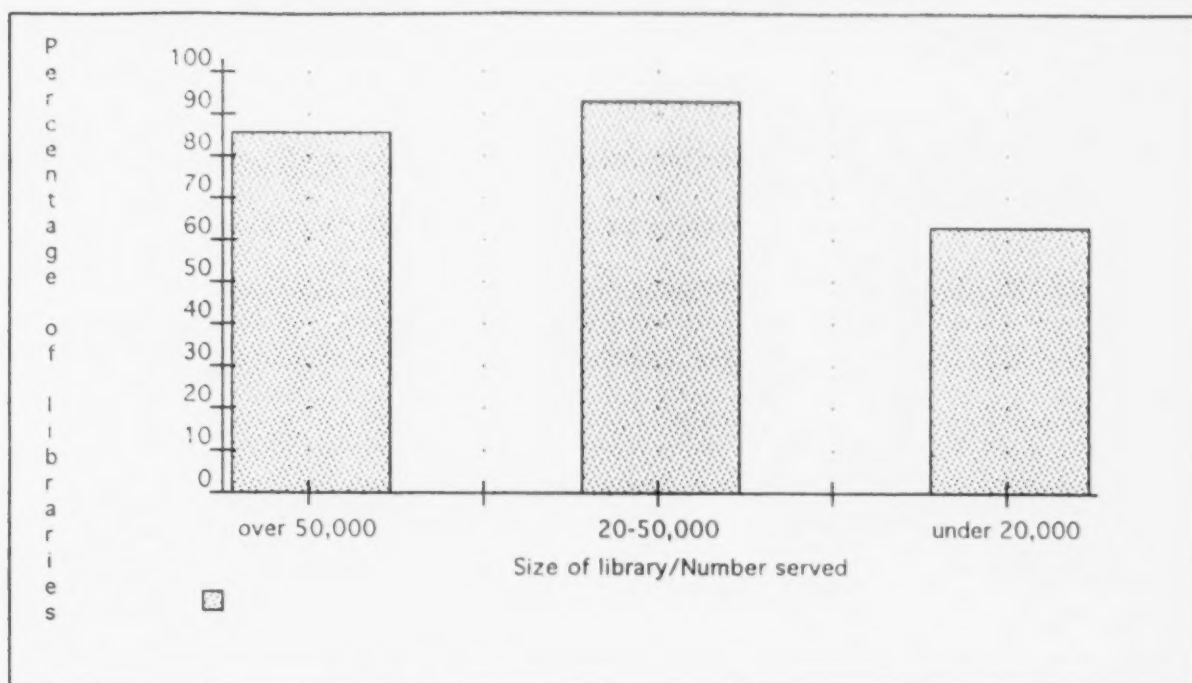


Figure 6. Percentage of Libraries that Offer Magazines for Older Adults by Size of Population Served

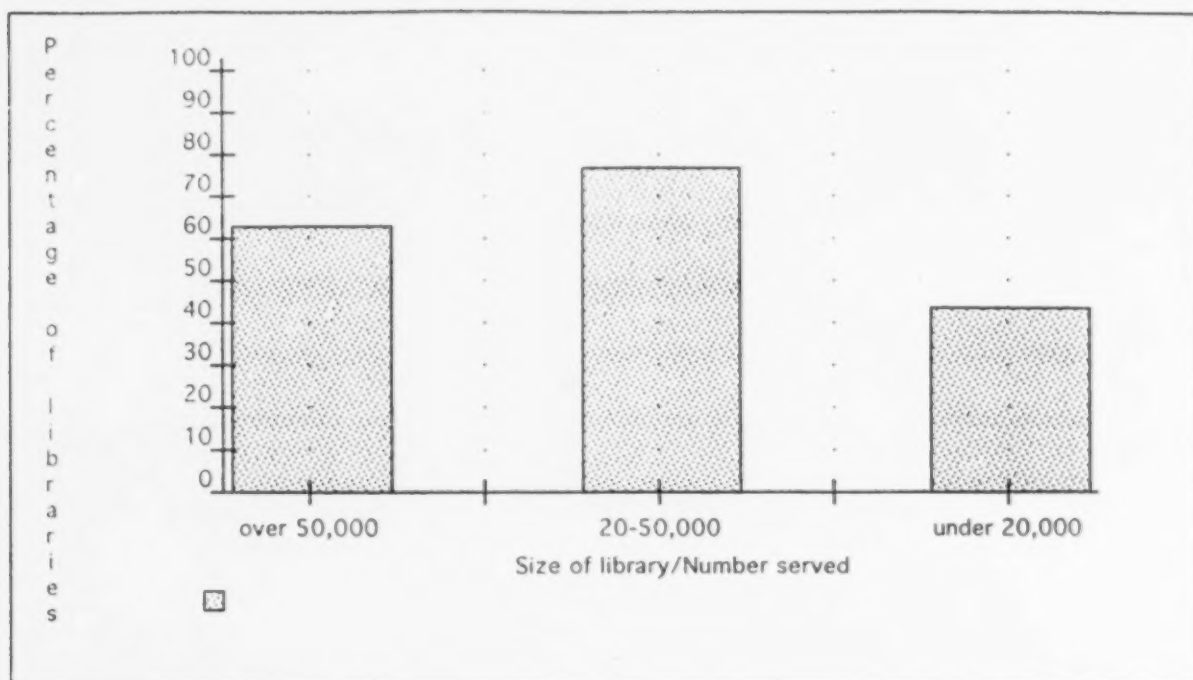


Figure 7. Percentage of Libraries that Offer Additional Services for Older Adults by Size of Population Served

registration. The percentages, 54%, 60%, and 36%, respectively, were lower, but similarly comparable, in terms of programming for older adults (see figure 8). Some types of programming offered by all of the libraries included travelogues, retirement planning, investment planning, and programs on Medicare/Medicaid and living wills. For both the question on service and the question on programming, the middle-sized libraries had higher numbers than the other libraries. There is no apparent reason for this finding. When asked about intergenerational programming, that is, programming involving older adults and young children, the larger and medium-sized libraries tallied 69% and 60%, respectively, while smaller libraries only offered this type of programming in 36% of their libraries (see figure 9). These numbers are fairly far apart. This may be because of a lack of funding in smaller libraries, or perhaps those libraries do not feel a need for such programming.

Of all the repondents, only 24% employed a specific staff member dedicated to the service of older adults. Of these, none were employed by one of the libraries serving under 20,000 people (see figure 10). This, too, could be a result of either lack of funding or perceived lack of need. There may have been confusion, however; the libraries were asked who handled any older adult services (even if it was not a special staff member), and some of the responses matched the titles given by those who employed a specific older adult library staff person. For instance, Outreach Librarian,

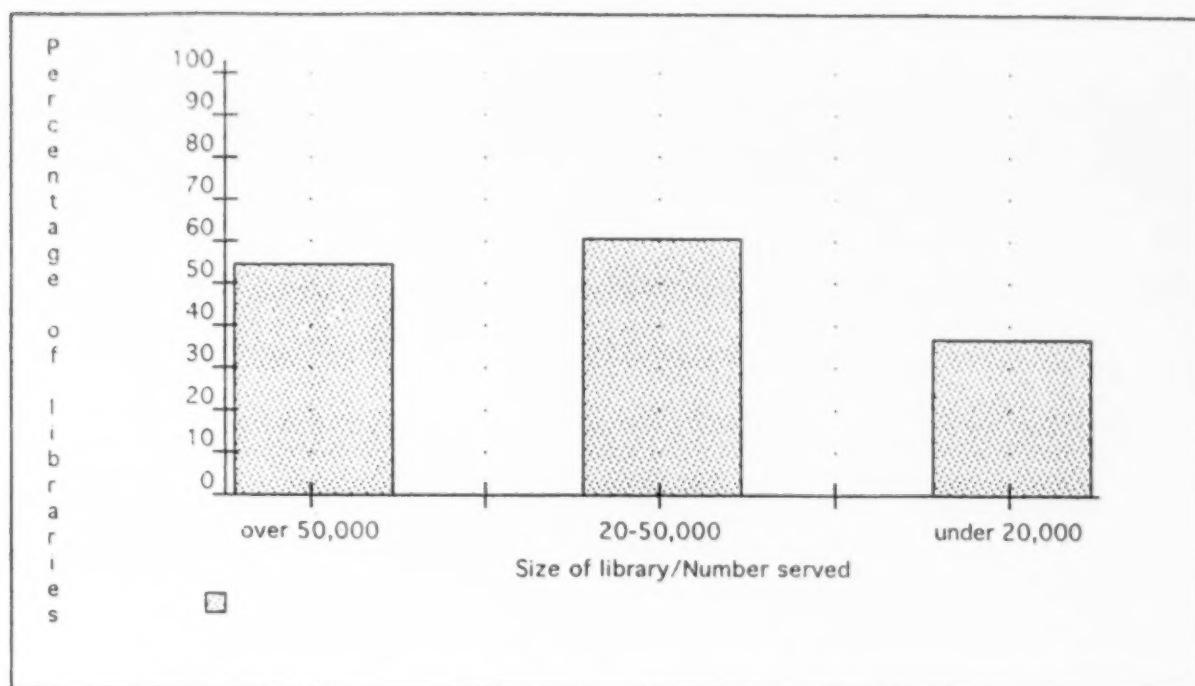


Figure 8. Percentage of Libraries that Offer Programming for Older Adults by Size of Population Served

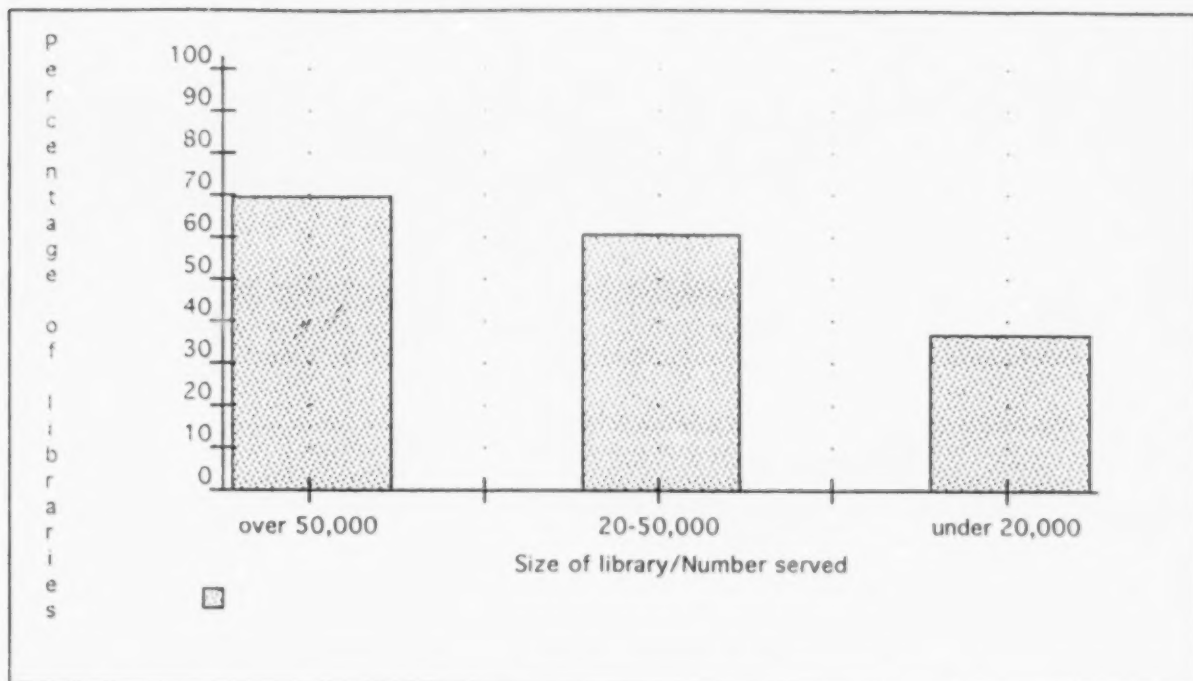


Figure 9. Percentage of Libraries that Offer Intergenerational Programming by Size of Population Served

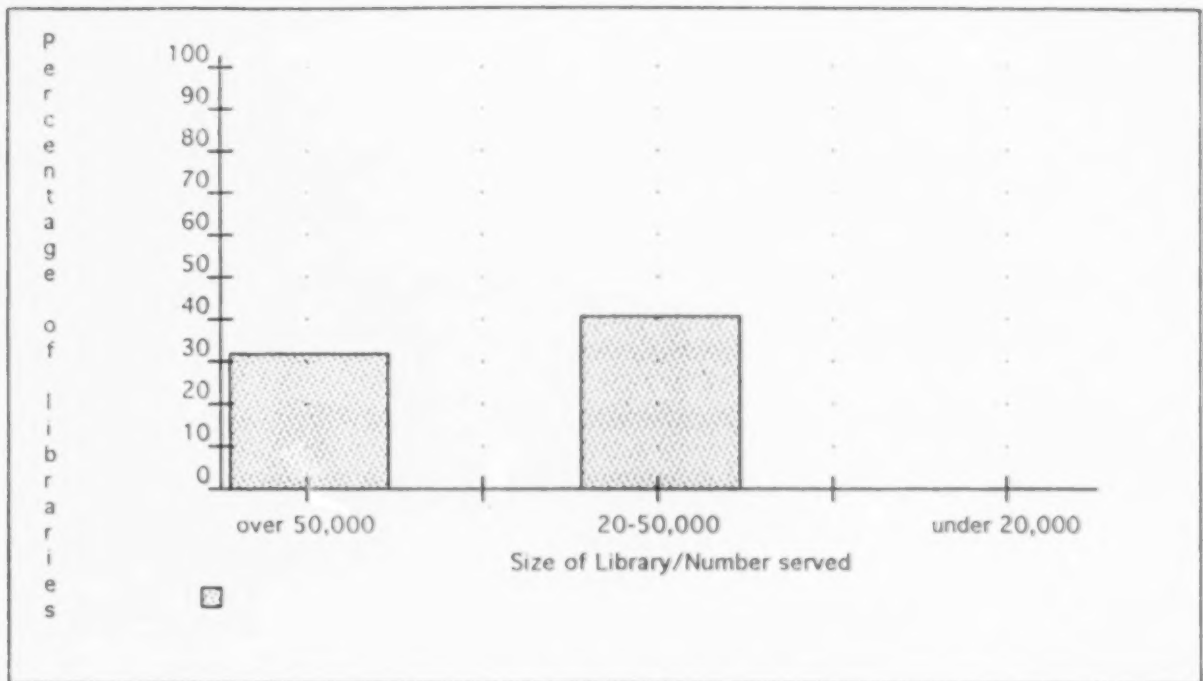


Figure 10. Percentage of Libraries that Employ Specific Staff for Older Adults by Size of Population Served

Homebound Librarian, and Extension Services Librarian were listed by several libraries, with some of them designated as employed as "older adult librarians" and some not. This confusion is certainly partly a result of different libraries having different duties for a common title. For instance, in some cases, an Outreach Librarian works not only with older adults, but also with teachers and students in the schools.

The last question on the survey, regarding changes in services and programming within the next five years, drew an equal number of positive and negative responses. A few mentioned getting a TDD or instituting intergenerational programming, and a few more mentioned in a general way that they would like to do some more things, but everything boiled down to the same thing for everyone--it all depends on their libraries' funding. Some then added that it was not likely that they would receive any additional money.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It is generally acknowledged by those in the library field that materials and services to older adults are needed in all public libraries. What is not agreed upon, however, is the degree to which they are needed. Large-print books and books-on-tape are common fare, but specialized programming for older adults is still only offered in about half of the public libraries in Northeastern Ohio, and older adult services librarians, under whatever title, are offered in fewer than one-fourth. The libraries in Northeastern Ohio are doing a fairly well offering and/or maintaining the materials and services to older adults that have been around for awhile, namely large-print materials, books-on-tape, and delivery services. The newer services, TDDs; special programming, including intergenerational programming; and specific older adult services staff need to be worked on somewhat. The American Library Association has recommended that lifelong learning programs, technology-based programs such as SENIORNET, and intergenerational programming be available in libraries.¹¹ Certainly with a projected 54 million people in the older adult population by 2020,¹² these things should be available.

APPENDIX A

School of Library and Information Science
(216) 672-2782
Fax (216) 672-7965



P. O. Box 5190, Kent, Ohio 44242-0001

Re: Public Library Services to Older Adults in Northeastern Ohio

September 5, 1995

Dear Librarian:

I am a graduate student in the School of Library and Information Science at Kent State University. As part of the requirements for my master's degree, I am conducting a study about library services to older adults. The enclosed questionnaire elicits information that will help me determine what services are being offered in Northeastern Ohio. This information will be useful to practitioners, as well as students, in the field of library and information science.

Confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed, as you do not need to sign your name to individual questionnaires; only the investigator has access to the survey data. There is no penalty of any kind if you should choose to not participate in this study or if you would withdraw from participation at any time. While your cooperation is essential to the success of the study, it is, of course, voluntary. A copy of the results of the study will be available upon request.

If you have any further questions, please contact me at (216) 527-4017 or Dr. Lois Buttlar, my research advisor, at (216) 672-2782. If you have any further questions regarding research at Kent State University, you may contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at (216) 672-2851.

Thank you very much for your cooperation. It is much appreciated. You may return the questionnaire in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope to me at the following address:

Rachael Hartman
8035 French Street
Garrettsville, Ohio 44231

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rachael Hartman".

Rachael Hartman
Graduate Student

APPENDIX B

Survey: Public Library Services to Older Adults in NE Ohio

Please fill out the following questions as fully as possible. Choose the best answer.

1. What is the size of the community that your library serves?

- ☐ under 20,000 people
- ☐ 20,000 to 50,000 people
- ☐ over 50,000 people

2. Does your library offer large print materials?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no

3. Does your library offer books on tape?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no

4. Does your library offer a delivery service to homebound patrons?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no

5. Does your library have TDD devices?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no

6. Does your library subscribe to special periodicals for older adults? If so, what?

- ☐ yes _____
- ☐ no

NOTES

¹Bureau of Statistics Treasury Department, Statistical Abstract of the United States 1994. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1993).

²Ibid.

³United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, County and City Data Book. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1994).

⁴Laurie S. Anderson, Louveller Luster, and Pearl Woolridge, "Reading Needs of Older Adults: a Survey." Wilson Library Bulletin 67 (November 1992): 41-4.

⁵Celia Hales-Mabry, "Serving the Older Adult." Reference Librarian 31(1991): 69-76.

⁶Bryce L. Allen and Margaret Ann Wilkinson, "What Do Our 'Senior Citizens' Want From Public Libraries?" Canadian Library Journal 47 (April 1990): 105-10.

⁷Connie Van Fleet, "Public Library Service to Older Adults." Public Libraries 28 (March/April 1989): 107-11.

⁸Allan M. Kleiman, "The Aging Agenda: Redefining Library Services for a Graying Population." Library Journal 120 (April 15, 1995): 33.

⁹Ibid., 34.

¹⁰"Library Services for the Golden Years." Library Journal 120 (March 15, 1995): 16+.

¹¹Kleiman, 34.

¹²*ibid.*, 32.

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